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SUBJECT: TIMOR-LESTE: SECURITY SITUATION UPDATE

REF: A) DILI 86, B) DILI 283

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The security situation in Timor-Leste has improved dramatically following the political crises and violence in 2006, 2007, and early 2008. Infrastructure has been rebuilt, the internally-displaced persons have been resettled, and the incidence of serious and even petty crime is low. While much of this is due, of course, to the presence of international police and peacekeepers, significant measures have also been taken to professionalize the Timorese police and military and to delineate their respective roles. The successful management of the tense security situation following the February 2008 assassination attempts on the President and Prime Minister and the recent transfer of policing responsibilities in three districts from the United Nations to the Timorese police are important indications of improvement. In addition, the ongoing progress in developing national security legislation and a national security policy is yet another positive indicator. That said, Timor-Leste will need to make good use of the "breathing space" afforded by the U.N.'s planned continued presence over the next three years to further strengthen its security institutions and ensure that the current stability is sustainable. END SUMMARY.

Background

12. (SBU) Timor-Leste has an unfortunate history of repeated cycles of violence and instability dating back for decades. Following the Timorese vote in the U.N. Popular Mandate on August 30, 1999, the Indonesian military and pro-Indonesian militia unleashed a wave of widespread violence that claimed thousands of lives and destroyed as much as 90% of the country's physical infrastructure. A mutiny by about half of the Timorese military, and disputes among the military and the police, led to another massive wave of violence in 2006 that destroyed much of the infrastructure that had been rebuilt since 1999, displaced 150,000 people from their homes, and set off a nearly year-long period of lawlessness especially in the capital of Dili. Despite the redeployment of U.N. police (UNPOL) and international peacekeepers, additional violence accompanied the 2007 elections and the President and the Prime Minister were the targets of assassination attempts in February 2008 by some of the disgruntled mutineers.

¶3. (SBU) Following the February 2008 assassination attempts, however, Timor-Leste has enjoyed one of its longest periods of peace and stability in recent history. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the Prime Minister convened the Council of Ministers, reached out to the Parliament, and instituted a state of emergency. State institutions responded effectively and an often volatile public remained calm. Perhaps most significantly, the Council of Ministers mandated the creation of a Joint Command that integrated members of the Timorese military (F-FDTL) and the Timorese police (PNTL) to coordinate operations to apprehend the perpetrators of the attacks. After the mutineers surrendered or were captured, the state of emergency was lifted and the Joint Command was disbanded. Since then, the F-FDTL and the PNTL have enjoyed good relations and have even actively cooperated on certain issues, although accusations of human rights violations against members of both institutions are unfortunately raised all too frequently.

UN Phased Handover of Police Responsibility

¶4. (SBU) Since the return of U.N. police and international peacekeepers in 2006, UNPOL has exercised formal responsibility for interim law enforcement in Timor-Leste. UNPOL includes nearly 1,500 police from over 40 countries, many with limited law enforcement capacity, modest English language skills, and no

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knowledge of local languages or culture. The core of UNPOL's force is four formed police units (FPU), detachments drawn from single countries numbering approximately 140 officers, from Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Portugal. The FPUs are based in Dili, the eastern town of Baucau and the western town of Maliana.

¶5. (SBU) UNMIT's latest reauthorization instructed it to begin a phased transfer of policing responsibilities to the Timorese police once the PNTL in a given district demonstrated the ability to fulfill command responsibilities. In particular, the PNTL must: (1) be able to respond appropriately to the security environment, (2) have at least 80 percent of its eligible officers certified as proficient, (3) have minimal operational logistical capabilities, and (4) demonstrate sufficient institutional stability, including proper command and control and acceptance by the local community. Since the handover process began in May 2009, authority has been transferred in three of the country's 13 districts (Lautem, Oecussi, and Manatuto), all of which are considered especially low-threat areas. Maintaining proper logistical support from Dili has proven the most difficult task in the first phase of the handover.

¶6. (SBU) The second phase of the police handover is expected to begin by the end of the year. It is likely to include three additional low-threat districts (Manufahi, Ainaro and Aileu), which did not have the institutional capacity to be included in the first batch, and Viqueque and Baucau, two eastern districts that are traditional hot spots of political violence. The decision to move forward in Viqueque and Baucau is motivated in part by the UN's desire to phase out the Baucau FPU by the start of its next budget cycle beginning in July 2010.

¶17. (SBU) UNPOL has come under considerable criticism for its lack of progress in developing the institutional and human capacity of the PNTL despite its now three year-long mandate. Its inability to make more progress in professionalizing the PNTL partially is ascribed to UNPOL's structure: peacekeepers from 40 countries representing the same number of differing police cultures and few with the necessary skills to be effective training mentors. UNPOL emphasizes that it will maintain a presence in the handed-over districts in order to provide continued operational support and to monitor the progress of PNTL officers. If required, UN police could also resume interim law enforcement responsibilities. The current Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Atul Khare has stated that UNMIT plans to remain until at least 2012 to monitor and mentor the PNTL, a sign that the U.N. may have learned from its mistake of withdrawing from Timor-Leste too quickly after independence in 2002.

The National Police of Timor-Leste

¶18. (SBU) Despite the progress that has been made, the PNTL continues to face challenges associated with poor resources, weak leadership throughout its ranks, and a legacy of politicization and indiscipline. It is taking steps to overcome a pre-independence/post-independence generation gap but its recruitment process is still seen by many as partisan. Basic equipment and best practices are not in place - in some districts, for example, officers take their weapons home because there is no secured armory facility. In addition, although UNPOL has invested heavily in training and mentoring the PNTL in larger towns, some have told us that they have neglected the PNTL units in the remote sub-district areas leaving them less prepared to assume formal policing responsibilities.

¶19. (U) In addition to the United Nations, the PNTL is also receiving considerable assistance from bilateral donors. The Australian Federal Police have had a program to help strengthen

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the PNTL since 2004 and have committed USD 53 million to fund their program from 2008 to 2010. They have deployed 80 capacity-builders to develop PNTL leadership and human capital, enhance vocational police skills and accountability, and implement a full range of operational policies, practices, and processes. In addition to providing a formed police unit to UNPOL, Portugal also provides extensive basic police training to the PNTL. The U.S. provides extensive support to the PNTL through regular training opportunities at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Bangkok and at FBI facilities in the U.S., INL funding for the establishment of a computer-based training facility at the Dili Police Academy, and USAID support for a community policing project implemented by the Asia Foundation. Other donors, like Japan, are also engaged with the PNTL on a smaller scale.

The Current Situation

¶10. (U) Despite its history of violence and instability, the situation in Timor-Leste has steadily improved over the last two years and is remarkably stable and peaceful at this time. Statistics from UNPOL indicate that Timor-Leste enjoys crime rates that are below global averages and among the lowest in the region. The number of assaults, for example, per 100,000 people in Timor-Leste was 169 in 2008 (compared to the worldwide

average of 250 and 795 in the U.S. and 796 in Australia) and this year's statistics to date have registered a further decline (see ref A). Crime rates outside of the capital city of Dili are even lower. In addition, statistics and anecdotal evidence suggest that almost all violent crime is committed by Timorese against Timorese; foreigners are extremely unlikely to be victims of violent crime (although their conspicuous wealth may make them more likely to be the victims of robbery or theft). Reflecting the reduced threat to Americans, the Department removed its travel advisory on Timor-Leste in September 2008. Australia did the same in September 2009.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: President Ramos-Horta believes the 2006 crisis marked the end of the first phase of Timor-Leste's experience as a post-conflict state. Subsequent security shocks (after the formation of the AMP government in 2007 and the assassination attempts against the president and prime minister in February 2008) have proven progressively less destabilizing. The twenty months since February 2008 have been the longest uninterrupted period of general stability in Timor-Leste's history as an independent country. The continuing drawdown of the UNPOL presence and that of the Australia-led International Security Force (ISF) is a sign of Timor-Leste's progress, but it will also remove an important safety net which has helped to discourage potential instability from breaking out. In the last few months, the PNTL has performed well in maintaining order during the massive public celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the 1999 August 30 Popular Consultation and during the October 9 local elections throughout the country (see ref B). Challenges on the horizon, including the resumption of policing responsibilities in hot spot districts, will test Timorese security institutions and give an indication of the country's readiness to resume total control by 2012.

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